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**Sent:** 6/30/2011 8:32:22 PM  
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**Subject:** NEWS UPDATES: Plastic polymer ingredient 'likely carcinogenic' -- EPA (Greenwire)

**Attachments:** DIB0001

## **CHEMICALS: Plastic polymer ingredient 'likely carcinogenic' -- EPA (06/30/2011)**

An ingredient in acrylic fibers and plastic polymers, acrylonitrile, is "likely to be carcinogenic in humans," U.S. EPA said today.

In a draft assessment from its Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS), EPA said studies have consistently shown that high levels of inhalation or oral exposure significantly increase the incidence of several types of tumors -- including in brain tissues.

The draft assessment could pave the way for the agency to issue stricter standards on acrylonitrile.

Acrylonitrile is a colorless, volatile compound that is used to manufacture acrylic fibers, plastics and some rubbers. It is easily absorbed into body tissues, the report says.

The IRIS assessment focused on exposure to the chemical through either working in or living near manufacturing plants or waste sites. The report acknowledges that there are no studies directly identifying health hazards of acrylonitrile exposure in humans, so it drew its cancer conclusion from a large array of studies on the chemical in rats and mice.

However, it does note that repeated inhalation exposure in the workplace has been linked to several neurological problems, including headaches, poor memory and irritability. It has also been linked to motor skill and vision issues.

The report says studies of occupational exposure have provided no strong evidence of cancer-related deaths. However, one well-designed study, the assessment says, found a small but statistically significant increased risk of lung cancer mortalities in workers with the highest exposures to acrylonitrile.

## **Assessment delay**

Last June, EPA put its assessments of acrylonitrile and three other substances on hold after scientists from the National Toxicology Program visited a controversial lab in Italy.

Industry had raised significant questions about the methodologies used by the Ramazzini Institute in Bentivoglio, Italy, and EPA was relying on some of the institute's studies in its IRIS assessments.

The NTP scientists did not specifically rule on the viability of the Ramazzini Institute's findings but did raise enough questions for EPA to halt the assessments (*Greenwire*, June 15, 2010).

EPA concluded in April that it could go ahead with its acrylonitrile assessment without relying on the Ramazzini studies (*E&ENews PM*, April 11).

Industry groups were unable to provide comment by publication time.

EPA will now receive public comment on the report through Aug. 29. At that point, it will move toward finalizing the assessment.

[Click here](#) for more information on the EPA draft assessment.

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